Collision of Ideas
Fans Violent Fuss

By Paul Hood
(Daily Oklahoman Staff Writer)

BARTLESVILLE, Nov. 4.—Was Bartlesville justified in firing Ruth Brown as librarian after nearly 21 years of service?

One bitter faction here says no, she was fired for her liberal ideas and that's an infringement of civil liberties. Another group, including the city's elective officials, says yes, any employer could be expected to dismiss a worker for insubordination such as she had displayed.

It's a dispute that has assumed community-wide proportions here in recent months, chilling old friendships and bringing charges of communist activity and counter-charges of witch hunting about an argument and side issues concern such things as censorship, racial equality and different interpretations of Americanism.

Behind it all is a collision of liberal and conservative ideas typical of present-day society.

The specific issue of whether the gray-haired spinster was illegally fired last July will go into court here next week, but there seems little likelihood that a court ruling can settle the issue.

These are the basic facts in the case on which most of the disputants can agree.

Miss Brown, 69, sharp-eyed, decisive, has been presiding over the Bartlesville library since 1929. During that time the library, housed in one wing of the Civic Center, has gradually grown without exciting particular public notice.

It had been operated under an old library ordinance which established a six-member board of control with provisions for rotating the membership.

Actually membership of the board seldom varied and the board's principal duty consisted of meeting once a year to handle budgetary matters.

More and more in recent years Miss Brown has expressed strong personal convictions on the racial problem. She has been identified actively with plans designed to gain equality for Negroes in the segregated Oklahoma community. This has led to work with CORE (Committee on Racial Equality), an organization devoted to translating the equality theory into action.

Starting about a year ago the librarian began to talk with Negroes with her to various community meetings, to church and even to the long-standing Jim Crow policy in certain city stores. Resistance and criticism was aroused in some quarters.

Opening of a lavish new YWCA building added fuel to the controversy.

Some Negro groups met in the center, financed through a public subscription campaign. Jim Crow adherents were incensed, although the YWCA directors stood pat and voted to continue to permit Negro groups to use the facilities. Miss Brown was active in discussion of the issue.

Rumors began to fly. Critics began to circulate reports that the librarian was putting out marked copies of what they termed "subversive" articles to public-school students who used the library for reference purposes.

Another rumor had Miss Brown displaying a picture of Paul Robeson on the library walls.

As these stories spread, several civic groups became interested, prodded on by members who were particularly alarmed over what they considered a threat to the peaceable community.

The American Legion was among these, as were the Daughters of the American Revolution and the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

In February about 40 Bartlesville residents appeared at a meeting of the city commission to air complaints against the library and demand an investigation. Mrs. C. S. Warren, wife of an oil company executive, was spokesman for the visitors. "Subversive" literature had been found in the library, she told Mayor R. H. Hudson (now deceased). "The Nation," "The New Republic" and "Soviet Russia Today" were cited as examples. What's more, Mrs. Warren said. Miss Brown had been too active in the race question and she referred to specific occasions.

What Miss Brown did on race relations was her own affair, Hudson told the visitors, but he suggested the complainants take up library matters with the library board. He named a citizens' committee to handle the matter with Mrs. Warren as chairman. Other members included Mrs. George Wills, Mrs. Edgar Suyser, Mr. J. M. Boll, Mrs. M. J. Kyran, Mrs. Frank Sisson and W. D. McGinley.

Russell Davis, chairman of the library board, called his group together and the citizens' board showed up to press its complaints.

The committee demanded the offending magazines be removed from the open shelves. The board argued for retaining them for the sake of presenting a balanced diet of information to library patrons.

When the the two groups submitted preliminary reports to the city commission at the next meeting, fireworks broke loose. There was a lot of heckling of speakers and some who spoke for the library board were booted from the audience and called communists.

"Who are you?" Mayor Hudson challenged one speaker who sought to intervene on behalf of the library board, "What right have you to challenge this group of respected citizens? Are you a communist?"

The citizens' committee report to the commission repeated the charge of "subversive" literature and demanded its removal.

"We cannot subscribe to the untried theory that persons of immature years should have access to commun-

E. S. Dunaway
He blames insubordination.

Miss Ruth Brown
Her job is at stake.
Angered at what they interpreted as a threat and also at the librarian's refusal to answer questions, the commissioners abruptly dismissed Miss Brown.

"She hadn't reached the bottom of the stairs before she was out of a job," Mayor Dunaway explains. The news was broken to her by telephone about 30 minutes later.

A few days later friends of Miss Brown descended upon a commission meeting in force and demanded to know the reasons for the action. City officials still maintain they gave insubordination as the reason. Spokesmen for the protesting group charge the commissioners evoked any direct answer. Miss Brown was convinced she knew what had actually happened.

"I believe as do many others," she said after being fired, "that my dismissal is attributable to certain of my personal opinions and outside actions which are distasteful to members of the board of city commissioners."

"I have always believed that discrimination on account of race, creed, or color is contrary to democratic and Christian principles, and I have tried to live as a Christian in a democracy in accordance with this belief."

"This has in no way interfered with my duties as city librarian, for the recently discharged library board found my work completely satisfactory. The newly appointed library board has given me no reason to believe they have found me otherwise."

段时间后的那次会议，市长杜南威、拉拉德和市议员们重新审视了该委员会的决定。

当她出现在委员会会议时，梅森沃森发现她会问关于她自己的问题，但这些问题却被拒绝了。她还质疑了由“论文”所引起的麻烦。

为了表达同样的原因，委员会拒绝了她的要求。委员会成员在会议上想提出一个这样的猜想，那就是这是一个“论文”造成的麻烦。梅森沃森表示，她会继续做这项工作，但委员会拒绝了她的要求。

法官詹姆斯·J·希格斯和巴特罗德维尔开始讨论撤职案，但随后委员会解雇了梅森沃森，并就这件事情作出了裁决。梅森沃森在法庭上表示，她会继续做这项工作，但委员会拒绝了她的要求。

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That apparently is a view widely held. Many citizens of the community concede that those on both sides of the fence are equally sincere in their convictions, but deplore the unrest that such controversies create.

Meanwhile, the library has been kept open under the guidance of Miss Virginia Lasby, a retired school teacher. But the magazines, "The Nation" and "The New Republic," storm centers in the conflict, are no longer on the shelves. They are tucked away on a shelf under the librarian's desk and can be had by interested, mature library patrons on call.

The new library board has not employed a permanent head librarian, pending outcome of the lawsuit. But there are at least four applicants being studied for the job.

As the showdown in court approaches, the citizens' committee which brought things to a head has virtually disbanded and no further work is contemplated for the group.

Meanwhile, the central figure in the case, Miss Brown, sits in her small bungalow, half a block from the library she served so long, and waits for legal judgment on her claim to be reinstated.